The Purchasers and the Purchased: On Sex among Posthumans in *Altered Carbon*

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the image of love and sex among the characters in the ten-part American Netflix science-fiction series, *Altered Carbon* (2018), in the context of contemporary debates on posthumanism and transhumanism in the United States, especially those on the new meaning of "subjectivity" Science fiction, when telling us about the future, in fact speaks about the present. Currently, it is the primary cultural discourse that so clearly shows viewers and readers the ethical problems of the contemporary world (Jameson) *Altered Carbon* goes further, discussing future changes in customs and sexuality in the Western world in connection with contemporary post- and transhuman discourses The objectives of the chapter are an in-depth analysis of the love and sexual relationships among the characters in the series, and an attempt to answer the question of what "love" and "sex" constitute therein

One of the most important characters of the series, Laurens Bancroft, who is over 360 years old and the richest and most powerful person in the world, observes that in that universe people can be divided into only two types· those who are active, i e who control the world and can afford anything they wish, and those who are passive, i.e. who are in fact bought by the those in the first group Bancroft states that in this world, "the only real choice is between being the purchaser and the purchased" The quote refers to the love relationships in the world in which everything is for sale, including emotions, erotic fantasies, intimacy, engagement, and sexual fulfilment.

By making the series, the creators of *Altered Carbon* have joined the debate that has been taking place for at least several decades in the United States

and in the Western world, on a new understanding of human subjectivity—a "posthuman" subjectivity instead of a classic "human" subjectivity in the Cartesian sense—and what it constitutes, including the widely discussed topic of the relationship between the body and the mind, the so-called "mind-body problem," and the possible appearance or construction of a new, improved post- or transhumans, most often directly related to technological progress (e.g. biotechnology) in our times. As Rosi Braidotti writes, "the posthuman predicament enforces the necessity to think again and to think harder about the status of human subjectivity and the ethical relations, norms and values that may be worthy of the complexity of our times" ("Posthuman Critical Theory" 13). Braidotti wants to emphasize that in the posthuman perspective, terms that were once clear and obvious are no longer unequivocal, and what was once certain with regard to ethical norms and the status of humans in the contemporary world often can be questioned

The ongoing debates also focus on the changing customs and standards in sexuality and the possibility of their further development, e.g. in the direction of a posthuman intimacy supporting the equality of the subjects involved, and of love relationships between humans and products of technology, or in the direction of treatment of intimate activities in a completely objective manner, and of sex as a commodity that can be purchased Braidotti, a practitioner of critical posthumanism, in what is likely her most important book, *The Posthuman*, emphasizes that "new technologies cannot but alter the organic human body through new forms of wanted and unwanted intimacy" (107) The human body, like it or not, is nowadays intertwined with ubiquitous new technologies, thus generating new subjective qualities and producing new forms of posthuman intimacies. In *Altered Carbon*, however, the latter of these directions is more often evident, i.e. sex is treated as a commodity that is purchased and consumed in the most convenient manner, the promiscuous, upgraded sex of the future is a refined entertainment for those in power. The body, in accordance with transhuman trends, becomes an element of the hypercommercial consumption culture—a product that can be improved and replaced, without any limitations, with newer models (Gladden 76)

Altered Carbon paints the picture of a late, slowly collapsing Western empire, with its ostentatious, excessive consumption by the richest and

morally corrupt social groups and the sexual obsessions of their members In our analyses, *Altered Carbon* is interpreted most of all as a bitter commentary on an inevitably deepening social chasm, related to use of the latest technology, between the privileged rich people, such as Laurens Bancroft, who resemble gods walking on the Earth, and the poorer lowest classes of the society. One of the elements in the series that clearly indicates the fast-growing chasm between the different social classes is the portrayal of the possible directions of development of the sexual lives of the people of the future The creators of *Altered Carbon* paint a detailed picture of the social changes that have taken place in the Western world over a period of three centuries, and focus on changes in the customs related to sexual behaviors, habits, and preferences In this chapter, we will analyze what the Netflix series says about the love and sex lives of posthumans and, consequently, what comments the series brings to the contemporary debate on the changes that may take place in the future, the shape of people's subjectivity, and the current condition of Western culture in the context of the discussions taking place in post- and transhuman circles

Life and Death in Bay City

Altered Carbon is based on the first part of the trilogy of the same name, written by the British author Richard K. Morgan and published in 2002. The plot of the series takes place in the twenty-fourth century. Humans have spread across the Universe thanks, among other things, to the invention of a breakthrough technology that enables the recording of the human mind and the human personality inside so-called "cortical stacks"—small, flat disks implanted in the back of the head, at the base of the skull Every citizen of the world receives one after his or her first birthday As soon as the stack is implanted, it saves the human mind and personality of the owner. After the inevitable biological death of the body, the disk can be taken out and implanted in another body, i.e in the so-called "sleeve"—either grown in a laboratory from DNA samples, owned in the past by another person who lost it for some reason, or in a synthetic body A person's "real death" ("RD") only happens if his or her cortical stack becomes irrevocably damaged. Otherwise, the disk with the brain of the person can be moved

from one sleeve to another without any time restrictions, which, theoretically, guarantees immortality. Of course, only the richest people (called "Meths"—from the name of the biblical Methuselah, who reportedly lived for nine hundred and sixty-nine years), the best-known of whom is the aforementioned Laurens Bancroft, can afford immortality. The Meths have their own clones made from their DNA, stored in the vaults of the Psychasec company that makes, delivers, and guards the security of the sleeves intended for the richest citizens The rich can also afford to regularly make backups of the data recorded on their cortical stacks, thus creating copies of their minds to facilitate a return to life in the event of an unexpected accident (as one can imagine, there are many people wishing to kill the richest persons and to bring about their "real death" by shooting through their stacks with firearms)

Of course, the technology of recording one's mind on a cortical stack brings about grave consequences. One of the most obvious and most evident consequences is the growing socio-economic gap Unlike the rich, poor people often cannot afford new sleeves. Rich people, on the other hand, have become virtually immortal, which enables them to grow their assets forever and to in fact control the world in which the lower social classes have become their servants

Altered Carbon, both the series and the book, tells the story of an investigation conducted by Takeshi Kovacs, a *former* soldier who once worked for the United Nations Interstellar Protectorate (in short, "Protectorate"), an interstellar empire that covered the planets inhabited by humans, and then a former insurgent (so-called "Envoy") who more than two centuries earlier fought in a great war against the Protectorate Takeshi was woken up after hundreds of years spent in so-called "Ice", which is a kind of prison for the cortical stacks of convicts, in order to solve the mystery of the murder of Laurens Bancroft. One evening, Bancroft was found in his office with his stack shot-through. However, he is still alive because, being one of the most powerful and influential people on the Earth, he regularly, every forty-eight hours, makes backup copies of his mind and sends them to third-party servers in the event of such an incident. It happens that Bancroft has no memory of the forty-eight hours before his death because he was shot just before the next backup was made. This is where Kovacs appears on the stage and tries to reconstruct the events leading to Laurens' death

In the investigation, he is assisted by several people with whom he has different relations and who together form a very interesting group. One of the persons helping Kovacs is Kristin Ortega, a police officer who has her private reasons for getting involved in the investigation. After a while we learn that the sleeve that is currently used by Takeshi was once owned by Ortega's *former police partner and lover, Elias Ryker, whose cortical stack* was put in the Ice. Consequently, Kristin's attitude to the visual aspect of the former insurgent is highly emotional. Ortega wants to make sure that Takeshi's current body will not be hurt so that when Ryker has served his penalty he can return to his undamaged sleeve

Kovacs's helpers include Vernon and Ava Elliot, as well as their daughter Lizzie The Elliots are a rather unusual family. Ava's cortical stack is currently not in her original sleeve, but in a randomly selected body of a white man, and during most of the plot Lizzie does not have a physical body at all and only exists in a virtual reality construct created for her by an artificial intelligence agent named Poe Poe is another member of the group that supports Takeshi in his investigation He is the owner of the Raven Hotel, where Kovacs resides during the stay in Bay City. The Raven Hotel *and his owner are a single being that resembles*—if we are to describe it using very human categories—a body and the brain that inhibits it The non-human subject endowed with artificial intelligence turns out to be quite devoted and helpful during the investigation and supports his human friends using unconventional methods, providing them with skills that exceed strictly human abilities, even "betraying *his own species" when* he causes the demise of another artificial intelligence agent, and eventually dies a digital martyr's death

Thus, we walk the dark streets of the world of altered carbon with Takeshi, *for whom this reality is also completely new and different from* the one he knows from his first life Together with Kovacs, we experience all the pros and cons of Bay City (formerly known as San Francisco in the United States)—a megalopolis in which the plot of the series takes *place—mostly those that are related to the customs and sexual behaviors*

that are new and unknown to him, and to the possibility of satisfying all kinds of physical needs

Posthuman Subjects: A Theoretical Outline

Before we start a detailed analysis of the images of love and sexual relations in the world in *Altered Carbon*, let us present some definitions In this part of the chapter, we indicate the theoretical approaches that are most important in our discussion, and that refer to the terms "posthuman," "transhuman," and "posthuman subjectivity," which are formulated in the framework of studies of those problems in the Western world It is of great importance that the terms that we will focus on have a substantial impact also on the non-scientific world and have numerous interpretations in popular culture, especially in America and Western Europe, of which the Netflix series is naturally part. As we shall see, *Altered Carbon* presents interesting comments on the complexity of the times in which we live, which requires us to reevaluate the terms, categories, and paradigms that, until recently, have been considered in principle to be unquestionable axioms Such reevaluation affects numerous fields of life and different phenomena, such as the non-obvious attitudes of people to new technologies, non-hierarchical links between people and non-human subjects (e.g. animals, plants, machines, etc.), and new concepts of subjectivity in general Posthuman terminology, especially as suggested by critical posthumanism, provides interesting ways to describe the new reality that is emerging before us and that will certainly be experienced by our descendants.

Unfortunately, in this chapter there is no room for presentation of a detailed typology of posthumanism (or posthumanisms), or to present the differences between various approaches, which of course are quite numerous. The term "posthumanism" is an umbrella term that covers, according to Matthew E Gladden, various and diverse fields and phenomena, from academic disciplines, through artistic phenomena, to the development of the latest technologies (31). The terms "posthuman," "transhuman," and "transhumanism" can also have different definitions In this chapter, we will focus on the best known and most broadly discussed definitions of those terms for a simple reason—they are the most widely used in contemporary debates about post- and transhumanism and in American popular culture.

Katherine N. Hayles, in her 1999 book *How We Became Posthuman Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, suggests one of the best-known theoretical scenarios of the posthuman future of people. First, posthumanism would give priority to information and communication signals, instead of their material media, including the human body. As a result, this could mean that the fact of material embodiment would not be a necessary condition for the existence of consciousness of a being, or of life in general. Secondly, posthumanism promotes a new vision of the body as a prosthesis that we have learned to use in the course of evolution Theoretically there is no reason not to continue to expand our body-prosthesis by adding new elements or to completely replace the prosthesis with another, better one Expansion of the body could lead in the future to a fusion of a human and an intelligent machine. The posthuman blurring of the boundaries would eliminate significant differences between existence in cyberspace (e.g a computer simulation) and bodily existence in "the real world" (Hayles, *How We Became*, 2–3)

A posthuman subject, according to Hayles, should best be described in opposition to a human subject, which, since the times of the Enlightenment, has been closely linked to "rationality, free will, autonomy and a celebration of consciousness as the seat of identity" ("Unfinished Work" 160) Thus, a posthuman subject would be associated with departure from the fixation on the aforementioned characteristics and with an attempt to emphasize the fact that the agency of the subject is "always relational and distributed" (161). Cary Wolfe draws attention to how Hayles continues to put strong emphasis on the opposition of embodiment and the posthuman, and materiality and information, while more recent posthuman philosophies instead focus on something completely contrary on rejection of transhuman fantasies of disembodiment of the subject and of the purported autonomy of his or her mind, which are the inheritance of the humanism of both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment (xv)

Transhumanism is sometimes described as a subtype of posthumanism, because both philosophies emphasize the inconstancy and variability of the human condition However, as researchers have noted, transhumanism does

not look to the future to find diagnoses of the current condition of humans, but rather constructs a "technoutopian future" (Hassler-Forest 71), and anticipates the image of an upgraded human who is a part of a "quasihuman, or parahuman species that can be fashioned through the intentional application of genetic engineering, nanotechnology, cryonics, 'mind uploading,' and other emerging or hypothetical technologies" (Gladden 74) For Cary Wolfe, it is clear that transhumanism directly draws on Renaissance and Enlightenment ideas about human rationality and subjectivity (xiii) In this context, it is important to clearly differentiate between critical posthumanism, which is a departure from humanistic philosophy, and transhumanism defined as "an *intensification* of humanism" (xv) Critical posthumanism, represented by Wolfe and Braidotti, focuses most of all on expansion of the spectrum of subjectivity in our reality by emphasizing that humans are no longer the crown of the creation, but rather only one of the elements of the Universe, perhaps not the most important one Critical posthumanism, as the name indicates, seeks to critically assess the current, historically conditioned dualisms and binary oppositions; it desires to force "displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 89) such as subject and object, artificial and biological, woman and man, human and machine (Gladden 45).

One of the most important differences between posthuman and transhuman approaches to subjectivity concerns the view on the "mind-body" problem. Transhuman approaches usually emphasize the superior position of the human mind in relation to the body, while posthuman ones try to see the mind and the body as two sides of the same coin within the paradigm of an embodied mind to appreciate the value of "vital bodily materialism," as explained by Braidotti ("Posthuman Critical Theory" 22). The high value placed on the body in twentieth-century science and philosophy as a part of the so-called "somatic turn," for example in the feminist corporal theory of Elizabeth Grosz, goes hand in hand with posthuman debates about the impossibility of the separation of the body from the mind in a new subject

Thus, one can see that a posthuman subject in critical posthumanism, represented e.g. by Braidotti, is defined slightly differently than earlier by Hayles. A posthuman being is every being that has a somehow critical approach to the historical construct of a "human" and wants to put it in

question Acceptance of the fact that each of us is basically a fluid, non-essential, and changing being is a difficult but necessary step toward the escape from simple definitions, categorization, and hierarchization of beings that we have been accustomed to for centuries The spectrum of posthuman subjects that are capable of acting and mutually influencing each other is widening; it includes bacteria, plants, robots, artificial intelligence agents, as well as "gods, monsters, animals, machines, systems," which we should look at not through anthropocentric glasses but rather as separate subjects of a certain agency (Callus and Herbrechter 241).

Later in this chapter we will see what *Altered Carbon* tells us about the post- or transhuman subjectivities of the characters in the series, especially about their relations to their bodies, to sex, and to love.

Being Transhuman: Sex, Violence, and Pheromones

The two elements that are binders in the world shown in the series and that are closely linked to each other are sex and violence. Both are strongly focused on the body and in most cases require a real physical presence and closely interacting subjects Of note is the fact that virtual reality is not a daily experience of the inhabitants of Bay City Digitally designed environments are used here only for specific purposes, e g. during virtual torture intended to obtain testimony, or during cybersex, and are usually perceived as less real than the outside world. A majority of the daily interactions between the characters still takes place in the real world, where biological bodies can mutually influence each other The situation is similar in the case of sexual interactions: old-fashioned, bodily, heteronormative sexual intercourse continues to constitute the majority of acts in the world of altered carbon, while, for example, visits to virtual brothels are definitely less popular Intimate practices most often do not require the use of any sophisticated gadgets, vibrators, erotic accessories, virtual reality units, etc , perhaps because the body, the sleeve itself, becomes the best erotic toy.

Natasha Vita-More, an American artist and transhumanism activist, claims that posthuman sex will no longer "look, sound, or even feel like the traditional act of rubbing membranes against each other," but will rather consist in "rubbing neurons," while genital pleasure will become obsolete

("Sex and The Singularity"). In the world of altered carbon, the characters do not *experience* such changes Intimate practices continue to be based on making love in the traditional manner, which conforms to the heteronormative rules confirmed in the course of genital penetration This is most often a man having a strong social position of power over a woman, who is subordinate to him in the course of a sexual act, as for example in the luxury brothel Head in the Clouds, where rich male Meths fulfil their most promiscuous dreams and satisfy their most secret desires using female prostitutes who are often forced to participate in such practices

At the same time, female Meths during sexual intercourse are most often femme fatale temptresses or women-mantises who use their sleeves with premeditation to catch men in the nets This is the role of Miriam Bancroft, the wife of Laurens Bancroft, who uses her sleeve-prosthesis as the best erotic gadget intended to tempt and sustain the sexual arousal of Takeshi Kovacs. The most recent model of Miriam's sleeve is equipped with a diffuser of biochemical pheromones that are released during the flirtation before sexual intercourse The chemical substance commonly referred to as Merge 9, which is contained in the saliva, sweat, and intimate excretions of a woman's sleeve, is intended to "put bodies in touch with one another," as Miriam informed Kovacs during a date in a hotel room where the lovers spent a night together

The sophisticated sex of the future may appear to be a genuine paradise for experimenters—of course those who can afford it. At some point, Miriam invites Takeshi on a trip to her private island to a real sexual paradise where there are numerous cloned Miriam's sleeves controlled by her mind and ready to make the man's wishes come true The rich can also use real and virtual sporting houses that specialize, e.g. in simulations of rapes and murders, who are operated by artificial intelligence agents The poor have to limit themselves to less refined services that are available on every corner in Bay City, e g clubs with the cheapest synthetic strippers or the so-called intimate joy biocabins advertised with aggressive neon lights

Posthuman sex in *Altered Carbon* is often an enormously brutal demonstration of force and power of the elites over ordinary citizens, as well as a manifestation of a hypercommercial consumption culture. The excessive consumption and the simultaneous mental shallowness and moral corruption

of the elites are evident during a party in the Bancrofts' luxury residence Suntouch House, where one of the main courses served for dinner is a huge tiger and where deadly fights between spouses in an arena resembling Roman amphitheaters are held to entertain the bloodthirsty crowd The Meths treat other persons who are not members of the privileged caste as subhumans who do not deserve respect and whose life and death they can decide on a whim At one point, Laurens even says about others like him "God is dead We have taken his place"

As if confirming those words, one of the women present at the party, Clarissa Severin, shows her friends her pet—a snake in which, just for fun, the cortical stack of a man with a criminal record was placed. Clarissa of course knows that it is illegal to put human stacks in the sleeves of animals, but she just smiles and says: "Laws don't apply to people like us," thus confirming the nearly divine status of the Meths, who can decide the fate of others without the slightest hesitation.

Sex in *Altered Carbon* most often confirms Laurens Bancroft's claim that people in the contemporary world can be divided into "the purchasers" and "the purchased" Sex and the body that participates in it are most of all commodities within the culture of consumption. They are objects that can be bought, sold, replaced, and destroyed The richest and oldest citizens have no scruples that would stop them from taking every opportunity to satisfy their needs at the expense of others. Like transhumanists, they appear to be completely unattached to their bodies They change them like gloves and have no problem with usurping the bodies of others, e g. buying sleeves that they like previously owned by others against their or their families' will Also, they do not hesitate to kill a sleeve in such places as the Head in the Clouds, a brothel for the elite located, as the name suggests, at high altitude in the clouds In that place, the Meths can make love to any sleeve they select, biological or synthetic, and then kill it, drunk with pleasure

In the context of the culture of late Western empire, it should be emphasized that the transhumanism-oriented immortal Meths are the elite of a new world that covers, among others, the territory of the former United States. The former American empire did not survive, its few remains (e g newspaper clippings describing Neil Armstrong's landing on the Moon) are presented in Bancroft's office like old oddities, grotesque museum artifacts

The bored and jaded rich man, who was born in London and lived in the United States, keeps the historical souvenirs from the era of the pioneers, adventure seekers, and ancient discoverers out of sentiment, posing as their heir and a contemporary continuator of their pursuits and desires. Learning new details of the bloody history of the Bancrofts, which was full of corruption, fraud, and murders, we see how inappropriate that comparison was Laurens resembles a parodistic image of a man of the old era who went too far in his pursuits.

It appears that *Altered Carbon*, by showing the consequences of a contemptuous approach to the body and its death, and consequently to the life of every person, is a warning about transhuman desires related to insistent efforts to become immortal and to show disdain for the body, defined in a cyberpunk manner as "flesh " However, it is worth noting that the series shows various contradictions in the perception of the value of the body. The main characters of the story, especially Kovacs and Ortega, consider the body in more of a post- than transhuman manner

More Than Flesh

The attitudes of many characters in the *Altered Carbon* series to their bodies are not unambiguous. As we have mentioned, the richest citizens of the Protectorate perceive their bodies mostly as tools that they use when they need them, and they replace them with others at any convenient time. They treat their own bodies in a strictly transhuman manner, as a useful addition to their consciousness, or "the sum of their feelings, emotions and past experience," recorded on the cortical stack (Trębicki 123). The richest citizens store numerous copies of their bodies, which have been grown from their genetic material, in Psychasec's vault, and in this process they resemble followers of extropianism, who currently freeze their bodies in chambers of cryonic laboratories (e g in Arizona in the United States) in expectation of future resurrection This procedure is now often considered entertainment for rich, white, older American men who want to cheat death The most powerful citizens of the Protectorate in the altered carbon world believe that this is what they achieved. They have cheated biological death by rejecting the bodies in favor of everlasting minds

These characters rarely have any doubts about their own identity and ontological status, due to their disrespectful attitude to body. However, others, e g. Takeshi and Ortega, are attached to their bodily sleeves much more and physicality still plays a huge role in their lives. This is evident, for example, in a scene where Kovacs transports Ortega to a hospital after she is heavily injured in an elevator by Mister Leung, one of the villains in the series, and is nearly dying. One could think that Kovacs's response is completely irrational and inappropriate given the realities After all, the man knows that Ortega's cortical stack is intact and that in fact Kristin faces no danger; however, he responds as if Kristin really is in risk of dying. He wants to save her sleeve at any price, thus confirming the deeply-rooted belief that the body and the mind cannot be easily separated from each other

When Kristin wakes up in the hospital after a surgery in which her injured arm is replaced with an artificial limb, she is shocked by the fact that this procedure was performed on her body, and she initially cannot accept this unnecessary interference with her biological sleeve Her materiality is inseparably linked to her subjectivity and the fact that her sleeve was cyborgized appears to be problematic, at least initially.

Also, the excessive attention that Kristin pays to Takeshi's sleeve and the attempt to protect it against any damage appear to be odd at first. Ortega's behavior in relation to Kovacs's body becomes understandable when we learn that the sleeve of the former insurgent was once owned by Kristin's lover. She is not able to do anything about the fact that she looks at Kovacs through the lens of the body, with which she once had so much in common, whose responses she is familiar with, and with which she has shared beds so many times An affair starts between the characters, which is very interesting from the point of view of the debates about the posthuman body. The developing romantic relationship between Kovacs and Ortega is, according to the characters themselves, based mostly on bodily attraction Kovacs, explaining their mutual attraction, notes that the affective reactions of his sleeve (e g the pheromones it excretes) are responsible for the feeling that occurred between them He believes that if he appeared before Kristin in a different sleeve, they would not have fallen in love with each other

According to critical posthumanism, posthuman bodies cannot fully give up the material aspects of their existence As Vivian Sobchack declares,

in the face of the current technological revolution, her enthusiasm towards rejection of materiality in exchange for virtuality "is somewhat limited" (170) According to Sobchack, we have to stop being overly enthusiastic about technology and recognize the fact that our relations with technological products have always been at least ambivalent Posthuman experience of the world will always be incorporated, and the body—a powerful tool for perception and building of the self-awareness of an individual—must not be hastily rejected

The relationship between Ortega and Takeshi matches this understanding of the body and materiality For those characters, the body is more than just a sleeve that can be quickly and easily replaced with another; the body has its habits, emotions, and memory The body is often not only a tool that patiently waits to be used or a shell waiting to be filled with a soul It is something that, together with the cortical stack that fills it, each time forms a different quality. An example is the smoking addiction experienced by Takeshi, who lives in Ryker's body Even though Takeshi was never addicted to nicotine, his new sleeve demands this substance and forces its temporary owner to smoke cigarettes. This is an example of a particular assembly of mutually interacting agents adding more bricks to the structure of the new subject. Ryker's sleeve possesses habits left there by its former owner, taken over by Kovacs and then modified according to his needs. The physical and mental problems experienced after putting on the new body demonstrate that a carefree exchange of bodies is not as easy, painless, and problem-free as one could think and as Meths would like to believe. Every change of the sleeve and every transfer of consciousness leaves a permanent trace in personality, and can even lead to nervous breakdown or madness An example of a character who experiences such problems is Dimitri Kadmin, also known as Dimi the Twin, who goes even further He copies his cortical stack and puts it in another sleeve, thus creating two versions of himself. As a result, after a while, both Kadmins suffer serious mental disturbances and become psychopathic sadists.

Altered Carbon constantly provokes us to ask questions about the ontological status of ourselves and of other subjects in the world, as well as about what constitutes our subjectivity. At one point, after discovering an unlicensed bioprinter of sleeves in the apartment of the Bancrofts' son, Isaac, who created illegal clones of his father's sleeve, Kovacs asks Ortega a rhetorical question: "How do you know you are who you are?" He also remarks that in the past one could recognize another person by his or her face but now the body no longer provides absolute certainty about another person's identity (Trębicki 122). This, of course, results in grave consequences, which *Altered Carbon* is striving to demonstrate.

Toward Posthuman Equality of Subjects

Altered Carbon, by indicating the multitude of bodies—human and non-human, virtual and biological, grown from DNA and synthetic—as well as their mutual interactions in various relationships, goes along with the inclusive, non-hierarchical policy of critical posthumanism related to a new understanding of subjectivity that supports "species equality in a post-anthropocentric world" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 86). The series shows many characters who cannot be called humans in the traditional sense They are instead different elements of the universe in complicated relations with each other.

One of the most interesting members of the posthuman world in *Altered Carbon* is Poe, an artificial intelligence agent and owner of the Raven Hotel He is a fascinating character who combines two imaginative traditions in Western culture related to showing machines endowed with artificial intelligence. On the one hand, these are shown as cruel and dangerous robots who threaten to annihilate the human world, while others are created as noble and sensitive creatures, always ready to serve their human creators. Poe combines the features of characters belonging to both these traditions by being highly dedicated to his friends and declaring "the study of humanity" as his greatest aspiration, but, at the same time, he acts as an autonomous individual, capable of threatening behavior Poe can arouse both fear and feelings of friendship and even love The multi-dimensionality of this character is also combined with the innovative concept of a hotel as the body of an artificial intelligence agent, which cannot be separated from his mind and which is necessary in order to accelerate the creation of new levels of complexity in Poe's mental processes The Raven Hotel is designed to constitute an integral entity with his owner The hotel's walls, beds, hallways lamps, and other furnishings are extensions of Poe's mind,

which uses them to explore and influence reality and also to satisfy the desires of the guests before they even express them.

When the elites of the Protectorate, headed by Bancroft, separate themselves from the world of the commoners, isolate themselves in their palaces in clouds, and reject the body while giving priority to the mind, Poe indicates, in the spirit of critical posthumanism, the importance of embodied consciousness and the essence of partnership- and equality-based coexistence of human and non-human subjects in our reality

Conclusion

Rosi Braidotti states that in a posthuman world "we need to be equally distanced from both hyped-up disembodiment and fantasies of trans-humanist escape, and from re-essentialized, centralized notions of liberal individualism" (*The Posthuman* 102). As has been noted, *Altered Carbon* presents a full spectrum of attitudes toward the body and materiality—from the transhuman belief in the primacy of a disembodied mind over contemptible body-flesh, to the posthuman appreciation of the importance of embodiment in the creation of consciousness and subjectivity, as well as the equality-based coexistence of various human and non-human subjects in the complicated networks of mutual relationships

The characters' post- or transhuman attitude to materiality is evident when analyzing the love and sex relationships shown in the series Sexual customs reflect the values of the different classes of the future society The lack of respect for the body demonstrated by the elites of the future world, who treat it as a tool to be exploited and goods to be consumed, is accompanied by a lack of respect for life in general. The Meths, as followers of a culture of excessive consumption typical of a late empire, believe that everything is for sale—both the body and sexual practices. Alternatively, the characters in *Altered Carbon* who are not part of the elite demonstrate layers of empathy to both their own and to others' bodies, including those of non-human subjects

The reflection upon the condition of Western culture and the growing social chasm proposed by *Altered Carbon*, depicted in love and sexual relationships within the series, may leave us disturbed The creators of the series

opt for the unconditional respect for diversity found in each form of life, showing us a spectrum of posthuman subjects coexisting in multidimensional affective relationships. The inevitable changes that posthumans will face are already taking place. *Altered Carbon* wishes to remind us that the clear division into "the purchasers" and "the purchased" is not the only possible lens through which one can see the world and the subjects inhabiting it

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